

History of Easton, CT

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This brief history of our town of Easton, CT has been researched and written for this website primarily from source material provided in an extensive study of the history of the town. That study was completed in May, 2009. It is entitled “Historical and Archeological Assessment Survey of Easton, Connecticut. The study was done by Stuart Reeve, PH.D, David Silverglade, M.A., and Kathleen von Jena, B. A. of Aspetuck Landways. It was partially funded by a grant from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, in cooperation with the Connecticut Humanities Council. The resulting document fills a 3 1/2” binder with single spaced type in a small font, each page printed on one side. In all it is comprised of more than 600 pages of text, tables, lists, and illustrations.

It should be made clear that in no way is this brief history of the town an attempt to summarize that thorough and comprehensive document. Rather the document served as source material along with some additional secondary internet research, conversations with some of Easton’s long-time residents, some additional illustrations taken from the internet, and photographs obtained from local sources. Throughout this little history that study will be referred to as the Aspetuck Landways study or survey when referenced. This article is not intended to cover all aspects of the town’s past, but to focus on the primary influences that came into play to make Easton what it is today.

It is our hope that this little tale of our town will answer some questions but more importantly that it will prompt many questions and encourage readers to learn more about the history of Easton.

Tom Spurr

How Did the Easton, CT of Today Come to Be What It Is?

If the question, “What were the primary elements that shaped the Easton of today?” was posed, the answer could be stated with four things: glaciers, English settlers, the Industrial Revolution, and Bridgeport Hydraulic Company. But that wouldn’t really be informative or interesting so this brief history of our town will expand on that cryptic answer in an attempt to explain how and why we have the Easton, Connecticut of today.

Glaciers:

Believe it or not, the story of the past that brings us to the present day Easton really began around 17,000 years ago. From roughly 25,000 years ago to 17,000 years ago, this part of the world was covered by glaciers, large (very large) sheets of ice, some thought to be as much as a mile thick. Historians put the boundary of the Pleistocene and Holocene epochs around 12,000 BC/BCE (14,000 years ago) and that boundary is recognized as the end of the most recent Glacial Period. The last glaciers left the area that now comprises Connecticut and New England around 17,000 years ago.

The end of this glacial period was caused by a rather rapid warming of the earth at that time as had happened many times before. Subtle changes in our planet's rotation and orbit along with other astronomic and geologic events combine randomly in very complex ways and bring Earth's climate to a "tipping point" that moves the planet from a relatively cold period to a relatively warm period or vice versa. Of course all of this is enormously complicated and way out of the scope of this discussion of Easton's history but suffice it to say that things did warm up around then and the glaciers left Easton.

But before those glaciers bid us adieu they shaped our town. They did what? Yep, they shaped our land. As the huge sheets of ice moved to and fro they broke up a lot of the bedrock beneath them into smaller pieces and dragged those pieces with them hither and yon, thus forming the countless rocks that are found in our area, many now seen as our treasured stone walls. Those glaciers also left the soil behind in various layers of thickness and account for the fertile environment we have for plants here. Very importantly, they dug out valleys and formed hills, and as some of the ice began to melt it seeped deep into the bedrock forming underground streams and lakes, called aquifers. At the surface the flow from the melting ice washed out valleys, dammed up in places, finally broke free, and further shaped the drainage of our land with rivers and smaller streams. ice sheet

As the plot thickens over the coming pages, it will become clear that Easton's riparian complexion was key to its ability to support the settlers that came as well as the Native Americans who preceded them. Lakes, ponds, and streams attract many animals looking for the food that can be found in those bodies of water in the way of plants and fish. And of course, all animals need water to survive. The streams themselves became important sources of hydraulic/mechanical power before the appearance of steam engines and internal combustion engines and electric motors. And as we shall see in the final chapter, those rivers and brooks and underground aquifers are key to Easton's ability to support its current residents as well in more ways than one.

With the disappearance of the glaciers over our land, plants and animals began to move in. It wasn't very far south of here that the ice sheets stopped so the plant life and the living creatures that come with it didn't have too far to travel to populate Easton.

Not too long after the first plants, generally referred to as "tundra," took hold, more substantial plants moved in. Archeobotanical research says that by 12,000 BC/BCE (14,000 years ago) we had forests in Connecticut consisting of Spruce and Fir and similar boreal conifers which were then supplanted largely by White Pine. (The term "boreal conifers" refers to tree sized plants that have needles rather than leaves and that reproduce by growing cones (like pine cones) rather than flowers. Thus the term "conifer.") By 10,000 BC, those forests had been replaced by hardwood forests of Oak, Maple, Cedar and the like. A bit later, these forests became what foresters sometimes call climax hardwood forests. It was just such a hardwood, climax forest that greeted the first European settlers in Easton. With these forests came an environment with a good food supply for man and animal. That food supply was in the form of plants and fruits and berries and in the form of the many other animals that also fed on these things.

Somewhere between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago the first humans showed up in the area that we now call Easton, Connecticut.

How did that happen? Well they didn't take Metro-North. The glaciers had their hand in that too. This is not the place to take on the many scientific and religious-cultural arguments about how man came to be or how man came to be in the Americas, but most scientists believe the following. During the glacial period that is referenced above, from around 25,000 to 17,000 years ago, an area of Alaska and Siberia, while very cold, was largely free of glaciers and snow due to ocean and air currents that caused arid conditions. And because of the large amount of water tied up in glaciers around the world in general, the level of the seas was lower than it is today by about 350 feet. The area called The Bering Straits between Alaska and Siberia, would have been above sea level at that time because of the lower levels of the ocean and is referred to as the Bering Straits Land Bridge, about 1,000 miles long. The fossil and DNA evidence tells us that quite a few species of large animals, e.g. the Mastodons, Saber-toothed Tigers, Woolly Mammoths, and others along with perhaps a few thousand humans from the steppes of Siberia crossed into North America using this temporary land bridge maybe over a period of a few thousand years. Some animals and eventually, probably some humans went the other way too. There is a great deal of controversy over when, how many, how often, etc. Anthropologists and Archeologists now accept that humans, originally from Asia, lived as far south as Chile by about 17,000 years ago. Some may also have come from Asia by water. Suffice it to say that the bulk of the scientific community would say that it took some time for those people to spread out and that by about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago they had arrived in Easton, Connecticut. We have solid archeological evidence of Native American occupation in Easton going back that far. In all there are 103 sites in Easton that have yielded man-made tools and other artifacts that indicate the presence of Native Americans here from that period and forward to the time of arrival of Europeans who first settled in Easton in the earliest part of the 18th Century.

We don't have much other history about those people. There was no written history and most of their population was decimated by disease brought to this country by Europeans early in the process. We do have evidence that in the period from about 1,200 to 500 years ago Maize agriculture appeared in our area along with some other crops such as squash and beans. This was an important change in the life style of our native predecessors because it meant that they could establish more permanent occupation sites, what we might call villages where they could stay year round. Prior to having any kind of agriculture they operated in nomadic groups that moved with the seasons to follow the food supply. It is interesting to note that in 10,000 years or so these native populations made no appreciable changes to the land, to the flora, or fauna. But within little more than 100 years the English settlers here had removed most of the forest that covered our town in order to accommodate their farms.

We have records of interaction between the natives and the settlers but with few names and few archeological artifacts or dwelling sites. One name that has survived was a Native American leader whose name was Crecroes (Anglicized from the Algonquin). A battle took place in the area that is now Southport in 1637, known as the Great Swamp Fight. The natives were from a group called the Pequonnocks, an Algonquin speaking group, made up of five separate groups or bands. One of those bands, The Aspetucks settled in an area called Great Swamp or Middlebrook Swamp in what is now Easton, somewhere along current day Cricker's Brook or perhaps beneath the Hemlock Reservoir. Aspetuck means "high place" and refers to the "up land" elevation of their settlement compared to areas closer to the coast where the other bands settled. Initially, following the battle, leadership was attributed

in documents and oral history to a Native American man named Romanock who died in 1760, but the natives disputed his leadership and leadership passed to Crecroes. He remained instrumental and his name is on many deeds including a 1670/71 document, The Northfield Deed, that passed a large part of the ownership of the area that is now Easton to the town of Fairfield. Crecroes is supposedly buried beneath the Hemlocks Reservoir, a bit north of Beers Road. Cricker's Brook, which drains much of central Easton into the Hemlocks Reservoir carries his name in an Anglicized form. You can find Cricker's Brook as it crosses Center Street at the bottom of the hill between Westport Road and Morehouse Road. There are a few other mentions of Native Americans living in Easton later on. In his book, *The Aspetuck Chronicles*, John Dimon Bradley tells a second hand story of a Native American wigwam on the Aspetuck River somewhere near Freeborn Road before the American Revolution. The last known Native American dwelling was a "shack" occupied by a man named Bill Injun near the intersection of Rock House and Sport Hill Roads around 1900. Estimates are that what is now Easton would have had about 140 Native Americans in the 1600's.

The English Settlers:

English settlers arrived at Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620 and at Massachusetts Bay in 1629. These early settlers, the Pilgrims and Puritans, were Calvinists (followers of the Protestant, John Calvin) and left England to escape religious persecution. They believed in a strict interpretation of the Bible. They also intended to convert Native Americans to Christianity. The churches that we have in this area that were founded by the Puritans we now know as the Congregational Churches. Their political opponents back in England were the bishops of the Church of England, the Anglicans, because the King of England is the recognized leader of that church. It was the Anglican persecution of the Calvinists that drove them to America. In this country, the Anglican Church is now known as the Episcopal Church. Naturally enough, these religious differences between the members of the Church of England and the Congregationalists became the basis of political divisions in this country. The members of The Church of England generally aligned with the Loyalists/Tories, who wished to remain subject to the King of England while the Calvinists aligned with the American revolutionary efforts and sympathies.

These religious/political alignments shaped the battles over land and control of laws and land in the early history of our area and on into the middle of the 19th century.

Following the Pequot Swamp war between the Native Americans and the English in 1637, Fairfield and Stratford were being settled by 1639. The city of Bridgeport, and the towns of Trumbull, Shelton, and Monroe were non-existent at the time as was the town of Easton. Parts of what were then Stratford and Fairfield, eventually became Easton and southern Redding. In 1667 The Connecticut Colony ordered a survey of the boundary of Stratford and Fairfield to settle land disputes. The northern boundary of Fairfield was set at the current site of Cross Highway in Redding. That survey affects areas of Easton down to the present day.

In 1667 Captain Nathaniel Seeley had purchased "the lands at the bottom of Aspetuck neck between the Saugatuck and Aspetuck rivers from Crecroes. The Aspetuck Landways Study tells us that Captain Seeley was killed in King Phillip's Wars but that his descendants were among the earliest settlers of Easton.

In 1670/71, the natives Crecroes and James, another native Sachem (chief) signed deeds with the town of Fairfield and the Pequonnocks signed similar deeds with Stratford. This purchase by Fairfield from the natives secured “the last six miles of the town common” of the Native Americans’ land holdings in the area for the sum of 36 pounds sterling. Fairfield’s purchase included what is now northern Fairfield, Easton, Weston, and southern Redding. The Stratford purchase included what is now Shelton, Trumbull, Monroe, and eastern Easton. These remote northern areas were not settled for quite a few years.

Shortly after the signing of these deeds transferring ownership of the lands from the natives to the settlers, the local government defined what were called The Long Lots. This followed an English practice of dividing fields into long narrow strips but this was on a much larger scale, with those strips of land reaching 10 miles inland, covering the areas that are now Westport, Fairfield, Weston, Easton, and southern Redding. The lots were distributed to local proprietors based on their tax payments and varied greatly in width from almost 900 feet wide to a just more than 30 feet wide. They reached from a little bit north of the current location of The Post Road in Westport, inland to the rear of Fairfield at the current location of Cross Highway in Redding, and from the Norwalk-Westport line east to what was then the Fairfield-Stratford line, now the boundaries of Fairfield-Bridgeport, Easton-Trumbull, and Easton-Monroe. That eastern line was along the current locations of South Park and North Park Roads in Easton. The Easton-Trumbull-Monroe line now runs a bit farther east than those roads, following the Mill River north of Easton Reservoir. There were no surveys done at that time and expectation was not that these properties would be quickly settled. But a landed elite was created and this played an important role in the economics of the Colonial era in our area. The Aspetuck Landways Survey tells us that there was little coinage at the time so ownership of land became a basis for credit and wealth and led to the existence of Colonial Land Banks.

Upright highways, those running south to north from near the coast going inland, were mandated by 1692 but were not immediately surveyed. We are told that due to poor upright highways early in the 18th century, Weston did not begin to be settled until 1725. By 1709, a cart track existed from Fairfield on its way to Danbury, running along what is now Redding Road through Fairfield to the site of the Aspetuck River, and then following the river north, still along Redding Road to it’s intersection with Black Rock Road where it then continued to follow the river north. This came to be called “Country Road.” A map below shows the “upright highways” along with the “cross highways,” the roads that ran east and west.

Of course through Easton, some of the east-west roads along with some of the north-south roads were later interrupted by the Easton, Aspetuck, and Hemlocks Reservoirs. Not all of the highways that were defined exist today, some having been poorly maintained and abandoned and some now lying beneath the reservoirs.

Settlement of present day Easton by Europeans began early in the 18th century or perhaps at the very end of the 17th century. By 1704 Captain John Davis had built a saw mill on The Aspetuck River at what is now Old Redding Road. The site of that sawmill is still an item of interest locally where a small building that resembles an old mill was added in 1935 and is mistakenly referred to as “The Toy Factory.”

This part of Easton, known by both the names Aspetuck and Gilberttown was the first part of town that was settled. It is the area of Redding Road, Old Redding Road, Westport Road (CT 136), a small portion of Wells Hill Road, originally known as Bradley Highway, and up to the location along Black Rock Road (Route 58) where the Bluebird Inn and Bluebird Garage stand. The Gilberttown Cemetery, one of the areas oldest, adjoins Toth Park today along Black Rock Road near the intersection with Redding Road. The headstones there date to the middle of the 18th century.

Later on, the “center” of town was the area around the intersection of Center Street and Westport Road (CT 136) and we will see shortly, other “centers” developed as well but no one ever became “the heart of Easton.”

The eventual settlement of The Long Lots led to a push for more parishes, leading eventually to the creation of Stratfield Parish in eastern Fairfield, Norfield Parish in Weston, Greenfield Parish in present day Greenfield Hill in Fairfield, and North Fairfield Parish which eventually became Easton.

The Aspetuck Landways Survey tells us that in 1756 the town of Fairfield petitioned the Connecticut General Assembly to survey the Long Lots and Cross Highways. The Eastern Long Lots, those now in Easton, became Long Lots 1 – 50 numbered from east to west. The surveys of those were highly detailed and tell us such things as the kind of trees that were there, location of fences, buildings, streams, etc. Those 50 Long Lots ran from the Stratford Line to The East Mile Common, now The Easton-Weston Line. The other 50 Long Lots, numbers 51 – 100 east to west, are now part of Weston. The surveys of the latter were not detailed and don’t give us much information.

Under the governmental system of the time in Connecticut, a “parish” was a political entity rather than a religious entity. It was equivalent to what we now call a “town” in Connecticut. The members of a Parish were responsible for creation of schools, maintenance of roads, hiring of ministers, etc. Norfield Parish was formed in 1757 from what had previously been parts of Wilton Parish, Fairfield West, and Greenfield Parishes, and became most of what is now Weston. In 1762, others petitioned for the creation of North Fairfield Parish from parts of Greenfield, Stratford, West Stratfield, East Stratfield. In all about 106 families formed the new North Fairfield Parish, in what closely aligns to the current borders of Easton. In 1787, seeking better governance, the Norfield and North Fairfield Parishes joined to become the Town of Weston. Most of the people who came to settle Easton were farmers but others were craftsmen and businessmen such as shoemakers, blacksmiths, carriage makers, mill operators, store proprietors and the like.

As mentioned before, when those settlers arrived at the beginning of the 18th century they were greeted by the seemingly endless hardwood forest that had grown there since the retreat of the glaciers 17,000 years earlier. While Native Americans had occupied the area for 10,000 years or more, they lived there without making any appreciable change to the land. The settlers saw what we might suspect was good news and bad news. The good news was that this hardwood forest would supply them with all of the timber they needed to build homes and barns and shops and ships. The bad news was that they needed to clear the land to farm it. But they came equipped to do that with saws and axes and draft animals and clear it they did. By around the middle of the 19th century it is said that one could see all the way from Redding Ridge to Long Island because almost all of the trees had been cleared. The stone walls that are such a wonderful feature of our Easton look like they pass through the woods in many places but they

were the fences in the fields and pastures of our past before those woods grew up again after many of the farms were abandoned early in the 20th century. The stone walls are made up of the countless rocks that the farmers cleared away for their fields. The woods that are there now are new ones. We'll learn more about that later.

The Easton of the 19th century was a much busier place in terms of commerce than it is today.

Some New England towns took on a form that came from medieval times in which residents lived in near proximity to one another, always with a meeting house/church and a town green at the center of things, houses and gardens surrounding with fields farther away. Wood lots and other areas were held in common. Easton didn't develop that way. It may have had to do with the terrain and with the primary occupation of its residents in the 18th century, mostly subsistence farming. The term "subsistence farming" refers to the planting and harvesting of crops and the keeping of animals (animal husbandry) for the primary purpose of feeding one's family rather than as a commercial enterprise. In the absence of coinage or other currency, of course some of these food products and clothing products were bartered with other locals for services such as blacksmithing or milling or for other goods or products that the particular family was not producing on their farm. As we have seen, roads were scarce and crude and all transportation at the time was provided by animals or human legs in the absence of navigable waterways. The farmers and the craftsmen and millwrights that traded with them needed to be close to one another. The scattered nature of the town's mills and the scattered nature of the subsistence farms of a number or acres each might have been the reason that no concentration of population ever occurred in any one place in Easton. There were small concentrations near the sites of the mills but as mentioned above, no one place ever became a large center of town. Over time the farming output of Easton became more of a commercial production but faded as the middle of the 19th century came upon us.

There were a number of small centers, typically featuring a school, a store, a meeting house (church), several shops or small factories such as a shoe maker, and a nearby mill that cut wood, ground meal, made thread, tanned leather, and so on. Shoe and boot making was an important occupation in early Easton. In addition to Aspetuck/Gilberttown and the Westport Road/Center Street area, there were several other "centers." Plattsville was the area around Sport Hill Road and the Mill River at the 1st Cross Highway. That area now lies mostly beneath the Merritt Parkway. A concentration of businesses and homes existed farther north near the area that now has The Easton Village Store, the firehouse, and Silverman's Farm. Initially that small "center" was a bit east along Old Oak Road. The eventual damming of the Mill River in that area shifted it to the west. A small concentration of businesses grew up near the Union Cemetery, the Baptist Church, and the Episcopal Church along Stepney Road. There was a school, a store, a blacksmith shop, and a busy tavern around the intersection of Adams Road and Sport Hill Road. A lot was happening along Rock House Road in the area of Valley Road and Poverty Hollow with a major mill complex and a foundry that was in Redding near the town line with Easton there.

Easton was not free of the practice of slavery during the 18th and early 19th centuries. In the Rock House Road "neighborhood" was a section known as Little Egypt which was racially mixed but had a small concentration of African-American families and individuals. While it was not yet illegal, slavery in Connecticut pretty much came to an end by 1810. The census data that we have from the late 18th and

early 19th centuries tell us that we had a number of free African-Americans and slaves among the households in town.

While early inventions of internal combustion engines predated this period, practical application of those engines didn't materialize until well into the 19th century. Water power had been the engine of choice since Roman times and remained so. That was no doubt one of the peculiarities of the terrain in Easton that drew people. The glaciers had left us with abundant streams of sufficient volume to drive the mills that were used to cut wood, to grind grain for flour or meal, to make thread for cloth from flax, cotton, and wool, to tan leather, to shape wood, and more. It takes a lot of water to operate a mill at the level of efficiency to make it useful.

Easton's mills were scattered around on the streams that powered the town's early economy, the Mill River, The Aspetuck, Cricker's Brook, Tatatuck Brook, etc.

In May of 1845 The General Assembly created the town of Easton. In the middle of the 19th century at the time of the formal creation of the town of Easton as a separate political entity, the 1845 State Industrial and Agricultural Census tells us that we had:

- 2 Axe Factories
- 2 Fork and Hoe Factories
- 1 Wagon and Sleigh Factory
- 2 Comb Factories
- 1 Tannery
- Multiple Boot and Shoe makers
- a couple of other kinds of businesses.

In all, 85 people were employed at wage labor with shoemaking employing the largest numbers with 36 men and 8 women. In 1845, Easton shoemakers produced 3,362 pairs of boots, and 577 pairs of shoes for market.

The 1850 census reported 304 households and 1,432 people in Easton. Among the most common professions there were:

- 260 farmers
- 64 shoemakers
- 11 boot makers
- 11 carpenters
- 7 teachers
- 6 blacksmiths
- and 6 paupers in town.

In addition to the people, there were 147 horses, 328 milk cows, 230 oxen, 579 cattle, 801 sheep, and 342 swine.

We had 25 stores, mills, distilleries, and manufacturing sites. Unlike the “dry” town we live in now, the Easton of the 19th century had a number of distilleries and taverns.

There were 112 coaches, carriages, and pleasure wagons.

But just about the time that Easton became a town of it’s own officially, it’s economic base began to erode.

These numbers didn’t change a lot when they were reported in 1868 shortly after the Civil War, showing a slight decline in population to 1,288 but by 1898 Easton had reached a low of 960 people in 276 households with 13 stores, mills, distilleries, and manufacturing locations, and the number of cattle had dropped to almost half of the 1851 numbers.

The Aspetuck Landways Survey gives us the following table, created from U.S. Census data and Town of Easton Tax Assessments.(Table 4.11 – Pg. 4-70)

Years	1896	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Population	960	1052	1017	1013	1262	2165
Dwelling Houses	276	267	300	331	461	731
Outbuildings	NA	NA	410	452	459	900
Acres of Improved Land	14506	15352	16259	16820	17587	16579
Mills, Stores, Distilleries, Manufacturing	13	4	2	0	0	0
Commercial (stores only)	NA	6	4	18	21	17
Horses, Asses, Mules	330	311	222	152	89	27
Cattle	882	1010	956	911	984	606
Coaches, Carriages, Pleasure Wagons	79	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Automobiles	NA	26	173	354	642	1190

What was happening to our town? While agriculture was the primary economic activity during the 19th century in Easton, the mills were the engine that drove the economy. As water power was supplanted with internal combustion and then electric motors, the very nature of manufacturing and processing changed dramatically. Cottage industry morphed into factories. Wagons were supplanted by railroads. Farmers sought larger farms in New York, Vermont, and in the midwest. Easton’s mills had lived out their usefulness. The availability of jobs in the nearby city of Bridgeport in particular changed Easton’s population. It is interesting to note in examining the table above that in the early part of the 20th century, Easton’s housing count went up while it’s population changed hardly at all. That means that households had gotten smaller. Fewer two and three generation households remained. In 1910 the average household size according to the table above was 3.9. In 1950 it was 2.9. In 1851 it had been 5 members per household on average.

But stay tuned. The story isn't over yet.

The Industrial Revolution:

The farmers and craftsmen of Easton prospered in their own way and even became important suppliers to the military efforts of the day, The American Revolution toward the end of the 18th century, The War of 1812, and The Civil War in the middle of the 19th century. With old family ties in Fairfield, closer to the coast and to the ocean where goods were amassed and transported, Easton's economic output was put to good advantage.

But by the early to mid 1800's, things had already begun to change. The Industrial Revolution was under way in Connecticut. Bridgeport was chartered as a city in 1836 and by 1840 the railroad had made it's way there. With it's seaports and railroad it soon became an important area for the kinds of larger factories that came with industrialization. The water power of Easton's streams and rivers was replaced with steam engines and later gasoline and diesel engines and electric motors. The small village type shops of Easton that had produced shoes and iron implements, clothing, and food stuff were being replaced by much larger factories and larger farms elsewhere. The very nature of Easton's land, which had been such a nice advantage in the 18th century for subsistence farming and water-powered cottage industry was becoming a liability in the new age. As more and more farm work was done with large implements and later on motorized tractors, Easton's terrain was unfavorable to larger farming methods. Small manufacturing was being replaced with much larger factories where more parts of the total process occurred. The availability of transportation from the seaports of Bridgeport and the presence of the railroad there were changing the business landscape of our area. Curiously enough there were two attempts to build a railroad from Westport to Danbury that would pass through our Aspetuck River valley but for a variety of reasons, neither proposal materialized.

On the positive side, the abandonment of some farms along with events occurring in other parts of the world, principally Europe, began to bring us a more diversified population in terms of nationality and religion in particular. The Aspetuck Landways Survey tells us that European immigrants began to buy farms at bargain prices and orchards and commercial dairies rejuvenated the agrarian economy to some extent.

Daniel Cruson, in his book "Images of America" Redding and Easton, tell us about some changes in the makeup of the nationalities and religions that were represented in town. We're told that the first Catholic, John Freeze, actually came to Easton from Ireland before the Civil War. Around 1920, a Czechoslovakian citizen in town noticed the availability of farms that had been abandoned and wrote to his former neighbors in Dovalova, Czechoslovakia who soon arrived, increasing Easton's population. In 1916 Ben Silverman, Jewish merchant moved to Bridgeport from New York City. He worked as a hired hand on several Easton farms until he was able to buy a piece of land at Banks and Sport Hill roads where he opened a produce stand in the late 1920's. His son, Irv Silverman still operates the wonderful and well known Silverman's farm near that location. There was significant emigration from Russia around 1900 by Russian Jews. In 1900 the Jewish community in New York City established a fund to help Jewish immigrants. The records of that fund show a loan to Philip, Lena, and Louis Snow from 1907 to 1924. As you probably know, we still have Snow's Farm here today on Sport Hill Road a little bit north of Silverman's.

The Olde Bluebird Garage and Inn, both still in operation today at the intersection of Redding and Black Rock were opened in 1919. In 1923 George Halzack bought the old Wheeler Blacksmith Shop at Center Road and Sport Hill and opened Halzack's Country Store, operating today still as The Easton Village Store under the ownership of Dr. Marsel Huribal.

In 1926 Arthur Richard Greiser bought the store that is still operated by his grandson, Dick Greiser at Westport and Center Roads. It had previously been Ruhman's Store and before that, Osborn's store. There is a long history of various stores at that intersection on one side of the road or the other.

By 1923 we already had a school bus in town so the process had begun to close down the little one room schools that served our scattered community. The consolidated Samuel Staples Elementary school opened in 1930.

The Industrial Revolution stirred the pot throughout the Western world and Easton, Connecticut along with other ingredients was mixed in there. But the recipe wasn't finished yet.

According to the Aspetuck Landways Survey, telephone and telegraph wires first appeared along Easton's roads in 1904. Rural mail delivery began in 1910. in the 1920's the local Grange, an old agricultural organization of farmers, contributed funds for the United Illuminating Company to extend electrical lines up Sport Hill Road to Easton. Aspetuck Landways Survey, page 4-72.

At the beginning of this tale the question was posed, "What were the primary elements that shaped the Easton of today?" The answer named four things; glaciers, English Settlers, Industrial Revolution, and Bridgeport Hydraulic Company. The answer could have been shorter. It could have been two things, hydrogen and oxygen, two primary elements, or shorter yet, one word, "water."

Bridgeport Hydraulic Company:

In the years from 1870 to 1910 Bridgeport's population exploded from 20,000 to 100,000 people as industry boomed there. The growing city demanded large quantities of potable water. The Aspetuck Landways Survey reveals that, "...in 1885 the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company bought its first land in Easton from Elihu N. Taylor who once owned a gristmill along the Mill River." The Survey goes on to tell us that P.T. Barnum came to town in 1886 and bought land along the Mill River. Barnum had started a company called "Citizens Water Company (CWC) to compete with Bridgeport Hydraulic. He built CWC dam #1 on the Mill River. But within two years the courts denied CWC the right to lay pipes under Bridgeport streets and CWC sold its assets to BHC. BHC replaced the CWC dam with Dam #2 in 1896. BHC continued to acquire land in Easton to meet the growing water needs of Bridgeport as its industry and population grew.

In 1914 BHC built the Hemlocks Reservoir along Cricker's Brook and bought upstream properties in 1920 including the mill that had been located behind what is now Greiser's Store at Center and Westport Roads. In 1915 the Aspetuck Reservoir was built. In 1926 the Easton Reservoir dam was built flooding the Mill River valley. Through the depression, BHC continued to acquire land in the Saugatuck watershed in Weston, Easton, and Redding, and in 1940 the Saugatuck Reservoir was built, drowning Valley Forge in Weston. Nearly every former mill site in Easton and along the Saugatuck in Weston was acquired by BHC. The mills were demolished. Many historic and prehistoric sites were inundated by the

new reservoirs, but BHC's land acquisitions brought other wonderful advantages to our town including comprehensive pollution abatement programs. While we might feel today that it would be nice to have those sites back and to have some of those mills as historic structures, the truth is that BHC and its activities in Easton have left us with one of the most bucolic towns in the country. Mills were sources of pollution along the waterways and also blocked the spring spawning runs of fish along those rivers. Now those problems were gone. Farms and homes along the watershed were also sources of pollution so they too were removed in most places.

Samuel Senior who was President of BHC lived here in Easton. He can be credited with the implementation of strong conservation efforts in our town. The coniferous woods that surround the reservoirs were planted by BHC and BHC personnel. Some of that too was driven by pollution and erosion concerns. As the level of the reservoirs changed seasonally, the exposed shorelines would erode and affect the purity of the water. The trees that were planted abated that erosion.

As the farming activity reduced and as BHC purchased watershed property, many of the forests that met the English settlers upon their arrival around the beginning of the 18th century here have grown back. They are not back to the "hardwood climax" forest stage and won't be for hundreds or maybe thousands of years. If you notice, the woods, while dense, don't contain many very large trees. The largest trees that we have are those that were left or planted for shade near homes while the fields were cleared. A large oak tree may take two hundred years or more to reach its maximum size and some of these trees are more than 400 years old. Nevertheless, our town is covered with lovely woods at stages earlier than the climax forest, along with the verdant fields, streams, ponds, and reservoirs.

In 1941, Easton's current 3 acre/1 acre zoning was put into place. Home sites below Flat Rock and Beers Roads east and west of Sport Hill Road are zoned at a minimum of 1 acre while the balance of the town is zoned at minimum 3 acres. These zoning regulations do more than provide us with a place to keep some chickens and a horse or two. If you live in Easton you are well aware of the amount of bedrock and wetlands that we have beneath us. Bedrock and wetlands don't work well for waste water treatment. In simple terms it isn't feasible to have a higher population density than we have, given the requirements for water and waste water. The zoning allows us to maintain safe drinking water from the private wells that serve all of the 3 acre zone in combination with private waste treatment/septic systems. The 1 acre zone, while still using private waste treatment/septic systems is served by city water so less land can support more occupants. But the result is lovely.

Easton has about 40% permanently protected open land and another 44% is owned by Aquarion/BHC. So 84% of our town is open space. On top of that, even the 16% that remains is sparsely populated because of our zoning. According to 2010 Census data, Easton's population density is about 262 persons/sq. mi. That compares to a density of 1,467 persons /sq. mi. in Fairfield County overall and 738 persons/sq. mi. for the entire state. Easton has the lowest population density of any town in Fairfield County. Redding is closest at about 285 persons/sq. mi. Today we are still at about the 1950 level of an average of 2.9 persons per household. The total population as of 2010 is just under 7,500 people in a little more than 2,500 households.

Aquarion Water Company, formerly Bridgeport Hydraulic Company, is by far our largest tax payer in Easton.

So how did Easton get to be the Easton that we have today? The glaciers arranged for the water, the settlers established a rural community with very high standards for education. We still have a school system that ranks among the best in the country. The water provided power for our forefathers, and now the water keeps our town looking wonderful and pays a big chunk of the bill.

With the creation of Samuel Staples Elementary and Helen Keller Middle School, with the Easton Community Center, with our many sports fields, today we find ourselves as more of a unified community than we probably were 100 years ago.

Easton is well known for its lack of commercial activity but we should thank those enterprises that we do have for contributing in a mighty way to our rural, peaceful town. Today there are seven places in town that sell things to the public from a store. They include Easton Village Store, Greiser's store, Maple Row retail nursery store, Silverman's Farm, The Aspetuck Orchards Apple Barn, Sherwood Farm, and Sport Hill Organic Farm. Then there's The Blue Bird Inn and the Bluebird Garage, Candee Farm, Snow's Farm and many Christmas tree farms plus a number of equestrian facilities.

The Greiser family has owned their store since 1926. The Blue Bird Garage and Inn were opened in 1919 and have been in the same family, the Weisers since the 1940's. Snow's Farm started up around 1907. The Silverman family has been in business with their farm, orchards, and store on Sport Hill Road since the 1920's. The Candee family has been in town well over 100 years. The Maple Row Christmas Tree farm and Maple Row Grower's nursery store are operated by the Edwards family who still have the original paper documents granting their land from the King of England. The same is true of the Sherwood family where Tom Sherwood has recently opened his fine farm store on Sport Hill. The Apple Barn was started up by a subsidiary of BHC along with Aspetuck Orchards early in the 20th century. The Gilbertie family started up their wholesale nursery business in town in 1986, having bought their first tract of land in 1984 along Adams road near Sport Hill. The Gilberties had been in the flower and nursery business in Westport since early in the 20th century when they arrived from Italy. You can see that we have a large debt of gratitude to these families who have stuck with Easton all of this time.

That's how Easton, Connecticut came to be Easton, Connecticut – water